

The Right of Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Spring '96"



CHRONICLE

Spring 1998 - citizen of Belarus Vladimir Matylyonok, his wife and four children, asked for political asylum in Czech Republic. In Belarus he had headed the Verkhnedviinskaya Rada of the BPF "Adrazhen'ne", in the Vitebsk Oblast. For holding this post he had been fired from work and for two years was unable to find new work.

At the beginning of April - the Ministry of Justice warned the belarusian Popular Front "Adrazhen'ne" for minor technical violations in filling out documents. Included in the warning is that repeated violations "may lead to liquidation of the party".

In the middle of April - in Vitebsk three students and pupils picketed in protest against president A. Lukashenka cancelling the public holiday of second day of Easter. They were taken in by militia and the posters with their demands were confiscated.

In mid-April - Mogilev student Yas' Abadovski was expelled from his institute for political reasons. Having been repressed on several occasions by Belarusian authorities for political activities, he requested political asylum in Poland.

17 April, a letter was published in "Narodnaya Volya" from residents of the village of Plis, Smalyavichsky Region of Minsk Oblast, protesting against the death sentence of their neighbour Igor Lyashkevich who was, in their opinion, unjustly accused and convicted.

(Continued on pages 6)

PUNISHMENT - FOR WHAT?

During the time between meetings and pickets the most dangerous business in Belarus became circulation of independent press. People selling newspapers at underground passages or crosswalks can be attacked at any moment by militiamen who confiscate "goods" and take them to the militia department. The system has

been worked out further as well: protocol is taken, a case is opened, a court hearing is held where the seller who suffered at the hands of the militia is made to pay a monetary fine.

Authorities were especially unkind to this circulating independent newspapers "Naviny", "Narodnaya Volya", "Imya", Belaruskaya Delo-

vaya Gazeta", Zdraviy Smisl" and others.. Many of the people selling these paper were taken more than once to court and fined. Mikalai Ramanov is a sort of recordsman (you see one of his arrests by special forces on a picture from RF archives), he has been fined already nearly ten times. Since

(Continued on pages 2 and 3)

DON'T ASK FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

ON THE 25TH OF APRIL THE TRADITIONAL DEMONSTRATION "CHARNOBYL SHLJAH"

TOOK PLACE IN MINSK AND AGAIN ENDED IN ARRESTS.

Now life and history become divided into "before Charnobyl" and "after Charnobyl"... It is possible that too little time has passed to understand what happened in those spring days but most likely we are not able to understand the horror of the tragedy which overtook our people. Only our children will learn the full truth.

But even that, what we know, see and feel makes us take action. Thought the only thing we can do today is not let authorities observe indifferently people's suffering by telling them that with coming years Charnobyl's tragedy is not going away from us but getting closer to us...

That is why on the 25th of April tens of thousands of people made their annual march "Charnobyl Shljah" through Skoriny Avenue. At the head of the demonstration women were bearing an icon of Jesus' mother, behind them were children bearing paper-made storks and further there was a sea of white-red-white flags with black funeral ribbons tied to them. And the ringing of bells was floating over the demonstration...

Taking into consideration the attitude of the Belarusian president towards participants of "Charnobyl Shljah", the tragedy itself feel it (he decreased all Charnobyl programs, denounced privileges to those who suffered from it, started propaganda that living conditions in the zone are safe), the action was openly anti-presidential. In the middle of the column demonstrators were bearing a huge "caterpillar" - a radiation mutant - a symbol of dictatorship bearing "I won't take my people on the path of the civilised world" (a well know Lukashenka expression). Activists of Moscow antifascist youth action (AYA) with their transparency "Long live Belarus!"

"Lukashenka - kaput, die!" contributed a lot to the demonstration.

The march took place peacefully without provocation from the militia and people in civilian clothes (also militia) and ended with a meeting on Paris Commune Square by the opera theatre. Speakers talked about the nuclear Charnobyl as well as the spiritual Charnobyl that today threatens all Belarusian.

Events after the end of the meeting in fact developed around the guests from Moscow. Belarusian militiamen, militiamen from special forces and those in civilian clothes set up a hunt on the representatives of AYA. When they were leaving the BPF office one hour after the demonst-

ration meeting a few cars with tainted windows approached them and people in civilian clothes got out. About forty people were captured. Only one boy from the Moscow delegation escaped.

Those anti-fascists were taken to the militia station of Soviet district of Minsk and reports were drawn up for the leader of the anti-fascists, M. Kasnacheev and fourteen people were, according to which were accused of insulting the president's honour. (They probably meant the transparency.) After the proceedings they were taken to the isolation cells.

The Russian Embassy tried immediately to defend its young citizens. But the administration of the isolation ward refused to allow the Russian

consular officer, V. Korol'kov, to meet with the detainees. Then the Russian Embassy sent a note of protest to the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Belarusian authorities promised to free the Russians by 4 p.m. 26th April. But the tickets bought for the Russians on the 6 o'clock train and the tables that were set in the embassy for the hungry detainees went to waste. They were not freed...

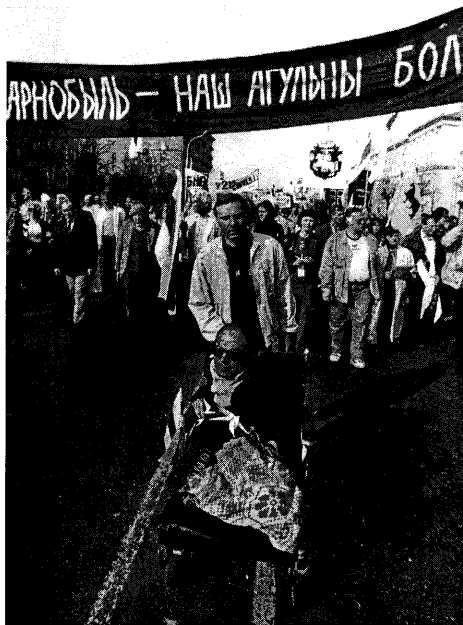
In this way, on the eve of the summit of leaders of CIS in Moscow, an undesirable scandal (if not diplomatic conflict) was growing. Then Belarusian authorities stepped back and the arrested Russians were convoyed to the railway station just before the departure of one train to Moscow. The militia convoyed the anti-fascists as far as Smolensk...

It became known later that Belarusian authorities had managed to find them guilty and the majority of them received warnings and some of them had to pay a two hundred thousand Belarusian ruble fine. It can be said that it was a mild punishment for the Russians because some of them could have been accused of calling people to kill the president (slogan - "Lukashenka - kaput, die!")...

It is strange that Russian was mass media did not mention the arrest of their citizens in Minsk. There was only one scene on ORT and there was not a word about the arrests of Belarusian citizens which took place on that day.

In the meantime Russian anti-fascists had the opportunity to see with their own eyes that Belarusian authorities treated Belarusian in Minsk preliminary wards more severely, roughly, ruthlessly (they testified to it afterwards)...

A. CHAS



PUNISHMENT - FOR WHAT?

(continued from page 1)

Mikalai is out of work, and selling newspapers is busy, risky and not very profitable business, he has no money to pay the fines. Now M. Ramanov is threatened

with confiscation of property...

Several other independent newspaper distributors have been tried more than once - G. V. Apanasevich, Z. S. Volkhava, A. M. Alina...

By the way, the actions of

the militiamen is illegal, without grounds. The only thing these newspaper distributors could be charged with is disturbing public order. But what kind of violation is that if people are standing quietly and peacefully

near underground passages holding newspapers in their hands. They are not noisy, do not try to advertise their "goods", does not bother anyone. The law on publications does not prohibit or limit sales of newspapers on the streets by hand. Therefore many independent publications, which state monopolist dis-

LABOUR DAY FOR THE KEEPERS OF THE REGIME

May Day, in contrast to other Soviet holidays, is still celebrated throughout countries of the CIS and this date has not yet been transformed into the new reality. Although in place of columns carrying red flags and portraits of communist leaders and victorious speeches we had one more "useful" holiday and something like a "spring new year", it is now slowly being painted over in Soviet-red colours.

In Belarus, this colouring has its own peculiarities. Here, the calls for revival of the Union sound stronger, but workers cannot express their problems on their holiday. Nobody says that there are salary delays, average salary is about 60-70 dollars (in the field of agriculture 20-30 dollars), as if it is not a fact! The same thing with products deficit in shops or with problems on getting the possibility for one constitutional right - to work...

Perhaps authorities understand that loosening the grip on organisation of 1st of May demonstration will bring only old people onto the streets, or bureaucrats and representatives of the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union. That is why for the last few years authorities have been encouraging the working class to celebrate May Day. The government hand down specific orders to production plants, universities as well as compose a list of compulsory volunteers. Of course we can understand when old people want to take part in demonstrations with columns of red flags - who does not want to at least in this way remember one's youth? Instead of the politburo hey carry portraits of Lukashenko, sometimes Lenin with Stalin, more rarely Masherev. And flags - not the current flag of the Republic of

Belarus but that of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, with the sickle and hammer. But still some of the demonstrators carry palm branches with paper-made flowers are carried to church on Palm Sunday. But it is hard to believe that any of them can notice such trifles. In contrast to fanatic supporters of Stalin and Lenin the majority greets the holiday and do not think of workers, rather how to plant potatoes. It is easy to "hide in the potato field"...

Belarusian Social-Democrats joined in the official celebration. Some Belarusian workers went out onto Skaryn with national flags on Labour Day to demand the release of political prisoners and better conditions of life for simple people. As it could have been expected, they did not get an opportunity to speak out for the authorities any opposition is an enemy and therefore is left out of the party. Not one of the workers gave a speech on Independence Square. According to the written and unwritten rules of Belarus today, here only the mayor of Minsk Yarmoshin or the president himself can speak during military parades. And the celebration is guarded by enforced militia units.

Both columns - official and opposition (there was one more - radical communists - who cannot be considered opposition given the Belarusian reality) peacefully left the square. A crowd of those "devoted" to May Day remained by the red stage listening to pop-style songs in Russian. The music could be heard even in the nearby Roman Catholic Church, roughly breaking its stillness. But those celebrating "red day" did not care about that... In the meantime a hunt for So-

cial-Democrat participants in the demonstration began. On the eve of the demonstration Minsk City Executive Council permitted them to walk the "opposition distance" to the Opera Theatre but the People's Gramada decided to show whom Independence Square belongs to. Perhaps just in case the night before the May Day march, leader of PG Mikola Statkevich received a notification to come to the court of the Central District of Minsk on 1 May.

Approximately an hour after Social-Democrat participants making their appearance at Independence Square, the leader of the youth organisation of Social-Democrats "Young Gramada" Sergey Martselev and his deputy Mikita Kolas were arrested near the military cemetery on Kozlov Street. At the same time Ales' Stankevich - a member of People's Gramada and head of the Association of Support for Independent Media Andrei Zavadsky were detained near the railway station. Detainment was carried out by officers in civil clothes from the Criminal Investigation Department who beat the people. Eight more members of "Young Gramada" were taken to the militia station of Moscow District of Minsk: two adolescents who were quickly released and Zmitser Marchuk, Alyaksey Gerasimok, Ales' Novikov, Gleb Kukharonok, Kiryl Yegidzen, Pavel Khavrotsin.

In the militia station were also photo-journalists Serge Grijs and Vasil Fyadosenko. At 4:30 p.m. Mikola Statkevich, leader of the Gramada, was arrested at the headquarters of the organisation.

Thus for 12 Belarusian citizens Labour Day ended with arrests, beatings, drawing up statements of cases

their only means of survival...

In the big picture, the struggle with distributors of independent press is simply the usual campaign, directed at destroying alternative channels of distributing press. The salespeople are not selling anything illegal, all papers that they sell can be bought in kiosks where they



and a weekend in the preliminary ward. On "red" day blood of peaceful demonstrators was shed.

Jana ZDANOVICH

P.S.

On Monday 4th May, trials began for those people arrested on May Day. In the Central District court, judge V. Esman was considering the case of Mikola Statkevich, journalists gathered. But they were not allowed to enter. This caused protests. When a correspondent from the newspaper "Narodnaya Volya", Valery Schukin, tried to get into the judge's quarters, three militia men "embraced" him so that they all fell down and former captain of second rank, now journalist, literally crawled to the judge's quarters with the militiamen on his shoulders...

Mikola Statkevich, who received a notification at 9 o'clock in the morning (before the meeting) was accused of breaking article 167 of the administrative code. In the opinion of the judge, the leader of the People's Gramada organised an unsanctioned demonstration on 1st of May. The judge talked to him about the march organised by the Minsk City Executive Committee, headed by Mr. Yarmoshin, in which some Social-Democrats took part. Then, what did Statkevich do wrong?

The judge put the case off until 12 May...

(continued on page 7)

tributor "Belsayuzpechat" takes to sell in trade for retail sale reluctantly and in small numbers, hire private distributors and give a special certificate for the right to sell newspapers. M. Ramanov has such a document from "Belarusskaya Delovaya Gazeta", as do others. But this means that sale is completely legal. The

actions of the militiamen is noting more than violation of human right to distribute and receive information, a violation of the right to freedom of speech. Moreover, one could include a violation of the right of citizens to work (since nearly all of the distributors are unemployed) and right to life, since their earnings are usually

cost less. So what threat do these people pose to the government? What harm? What are they being hassled for? Why are they fined and taken to militia stations? You can ask these questions tens of times but there is no logical, clear answer...

Andrey NALIVA

SITUATION

"Spring '98"
Centre
The Bulletin of the Human Rights

3 THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM

"VYBAR" HAS MADE ITS CHOICE

A CHRONICLE OF ONE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Until the last referendum nearly all of the members of the Vitebsk organisation "Vybar" BPF "Adrazhen'ne" had protested and repealed administrative punishment. It helped that they had knowledge of the law and followed it in their public and political activities.

After the referendum in November 1996 in which 48 percent (and not the 80 percent that authorities claim) of Vitebsk city residents took part, everything changed.

The case that was opened by KGB back in 1996 article 63 of the Criminal Code of Republic of Belarus (call to terrorist act) against the author of poetry "Kill the President" Slavimir Adamovitch, editor of the newspaper "Vybar" Barys Khamaida and chairman of the BPF organisation "Vybar" "Adrazhen'ne" Uladzimir Pleschanka, seemed even from the beginning to have no chance. During the judicial process, that began in November 1996 and lasted through June 1997, they were unable to prove the guilt of those charged. Accused B. Khamaida and U. Pleschanka did not give deposition during the investigation and who during the court hearings announced that they had printed the poetry on purpose as a piece of art, and - in democratic countries - one cannot be charged for that.

In the course of the court process the newspaper "Vybar", regardless of the fact that the editor's computer was temporarily confiscated, continued to be published. The poetry was printed yet another time. B. Khamaida requested that a copy of the paper in which the poetry was printed be attached to the case, but the court paid no attention to it.

The position of members of the organisation "Vybar", of course, was helped to a great extent by the fact that poet S. Adamovitch was let out of jail before the trial. However, authorities punished S. Adamovitch, B. Khamaida and U. Pleschanka. But not according to article 67 of the criminal code, according to article 188 of the criminal code which had not been mentioned before, not during the investigation and not during the trial. According to this article the court found in the poetry not a call to assassination but an insult to the president of the Republic of Belarus A. Lukashenka. In addition, each of the "convicted" was charged to pay for translation fees, since they spoke Belarusian. And U. Pleschanka and B. Khamaida were made to pay lawyers' fees although they refused legal counsel from the very beginning of the process, planning to defend themselves independently.

All through 1997 and up until now, investigators of the Chigunachny militia of Vitebsk have not been able to find the criminals who 11 December, in broad daylight, in the middle of a high traffic area in the centre of the city, cruelly beat Yuras Maroz, distributor of independent press.

Today, probably, this would not happen but it is obvious that through inertia,

trying not to go out of bounds of the law, in 1997 Pershamaiski district court of Vitebsk, reinstated chairman of the organisation "Vybar" Uladzimir Pleschanka to the position of Engineer-constructor of the production association "Manalit" after an illegal redundancy and over a year of unemployment. This, by the way, was the second such occurrence. The first time U. Pleschanka was made redundant, and then reinstated at the very same "Manalit" back in 1994. Now the administration pretends not to pay attention to his political activities, and the ability of U. Pleschanka to stand up for his rights in court in a civilised and meticulous manner only causes his colleagues to respect him.

In the spring of 1997, the organisation "Vybar" in answer to the presidents decree of March 5, 1997 (which regulated the holding of meetings and events, prohibited pickets without approval from authorities and increased fines to incredible levels) became very politically active, arranging pickets on the streets of Vitebsk. In fact, the members of the group "Vybar" practically ignored the presidential decree as it contradicted the legislation based in the Constitution of 1994.

The first picket was organised 15 March, 1997 - on the day the Constitution was approved in 1994 - on the Square of Will in the very centre of the city, across from the former building of the Communist Party headquarters. This is one of the most heavily trafficked areas of the city. Here at one time the first democratic meetings were held. After that, city authorities allowed only communists and pro-Russian organisations (Slavyansky Sobor, Belaya Rus', Liberal Democrat Party of Russia, Communist Party) to hold meetings and pickets there or organised the official events themselves.

On the posters of picket participants were calls to defend the Constitution of 1994, criticism of actions of the Belarusian president. The picket continued for nearly an hour and a half, then the militiamen from the Kastychnitsky militia department forcefully pushed the more active participants of the picket Zmitser Pimenav, Yuras Karpav, Barys Khamaida and Uladzimir Pleschanka into the militia buses and took them to the station. They then forced the remainder of the people to disperse. At the station they drew up the report and after three hours released them, "inviting" them to show up the following day. All four of them ignored this "invitation". Soon to come was the 25th of March, any time spent in court would be time wasted. 23 March a few members of "Vybar" prepared to take part in the meeting in Minsk. U. Pleschanka and B. Khamaida took with them some copies of the newspaper "Vybar" to pass around. They were detained by militia of the Frunzensky District, Minsk near the red church on Independence Square and taken to the station where reports were drawn up on both

of them for distributing newspapers. In the evening they were transported along with other detainees to a temporary holding cell outside of Minsk and on the morning of 24 March brought into court.

The court sentenced Barys Khamaida to three million rubble fine, and Uladzimir Pleschanka - three days of administrative arrest. Evening 24 March, the doctor measured the blood pressure of U. Pleschanka (who was awaiting transport to sit out his sentence), learned that he had suffered a heart attack and refused to accept him for further sentence.

Evening on 25 March members of the organisation "Vybar" BPF "Adrazhen'ne", as on 15 March, went out on the Vitebsk Square of Will with posters and wishes for Vitebsk residents on the anniversary of the creation of Belarusian People's Republic as well as white-red-white flags. At 5:30 p.m. militiamen of the Kastychnitsky District shoved picketers into their buses and took them to the militia station, drew up reports of their breaking the law and after three hours, released them - telling them to return to the station the following morning. As on 15 March, they decided not to voluntarily return to the station.

During the day 2 April, while distributing independent newspapers next to the Square of Will, in one of the most highly trafficked areas on Lenin street, the chief editor of the newspaper "Vybar" - Barys Khamaida - was arrested. On his chest he was wearing a piece of paper on which was written "Belarus, independence, spring." The militiamen of Chygunachny District took him to the station and then to court. Judge Fyodorov decided that the actions of B. Khamaida fall under a violation of the decree number 5. Moreover that the accused claimed that he did not recognise decree number 5, issued by the president. As a result, B. Khamaida was sentenced to a three million rubble fine. From that court decision began countless millions of fines for members of the organisation "Vybar" for holding a unsanctioned pickets.

That very day, in the evening, just as on 15th and 25th March, the organisation held a picket on the Square of Will. One of the posters which Yuras Maroz was holding bore the slogan "As long as Lukashenka is leading Belarus, neither NATO nor Russia, nor any other union will take us." The purpose of the picket was to protest against the signing of the union agreement between Belarus and Russia. On the square, a practically unplanned meeting was about to take place until, catching sight of militiamen, the majority of people ran away. Militiamen detained Yuras Maroz, Uladzimir Pleschanka, Barys Khamaida, Yuras Karpov. Once again the militiamen of Kastychnitsky District released them after drawing up reports.

After a few days everyone who had been detained 15th, 25th March and 2nd April, started receiving notifications. Not



On the photo: Yuras Maroz picketing in Minsk at the court building, where the process was held for A. Shydlouskyy and V. Labkovich

waiting for the accused, the Kastrychinsky District court of the city of Vitebsk, 16th April sentenced Yuras Maroz to a three million rubble fine, 5th May Zmitser Pimenov - five days of administrative arrest, 14th May Y. Karpov was fined one million rubbles, B. Khamaida - one and three million rubble fines, 15th May U. Pleschanka - nine and five million rubble fines, 26th June Yuras Karpov was sentenced to 3 days administrative arrest.

On the fourth of April, as on the second of April, Barys Khamaida was detained for selling independent newspapers while donning the poster with "Belarus, independence, spring." This time the same judge Fyodarev gave him a 22.5 Belarusian rubble fine. When Barys Khamaida appeared by the same "blue house" with newspapers and poster "I love Belarus" he was taken by to Chygunsky District station by militiamen and then to judge Fyodarev again. The latter was afraid of punishing Khamaida once again so he justified Barys. On 17th April, the anniversary day of Vitebsk receiving Magdeburg rights, a picket was held by the same "blue house." There were two posters - on one was written "200 years ago in Vitebsk, the system of self-rule was instituted - Magdeburg rights!" and on the other one "What sort of rights do we have now? To be in prison and pay fines for our wish to be called people?" Barys Khamaida and Uladimir Pleschenka were detained at four o'clock p.m. The courts were already closed, so they received notifications to appear in court on the 21st April.

On April 21, Barys came to court to the same judge Fyodarev who gave him another 22.5 million rubble fine (at that time it was equal to nearly one thousand US dollars), and U. Pleschenka did not appear in court.

April 26, on the anniversary of the Charnobyl tragedy, the organisation "Vybar" held a picket by the "blue house."

Participants of the picket bore posters with slogans "New Union - New Charnobyl!", "Youth! Organise Belarusian freedom movement against Russian occupation!". At the beginning of the picket, militia did not touch participants, but when they moved towards Square of Will Khamaida and Pleschenka were captured and taken to Chygunsky District militia station. A little later Yuras Maroz was taken to Kastrychnitsky District militia station from Square of Will.

Again, the courts were closed so they received notifications to appear in court the following day. Not one of them agreed to go to the militia station. Barys Khamaida and Yuras Maroz continued to sell newspapers by the "blue house" and the militiamen paid no attention to them. But on the 29th of April Barys Khamaida was detained again with his poster "Belarus, independence, spring." This time judge Fyodarev refused to consider the report on the events of the 29th of April but examined the report of events which took place on 26th April. The judge did not find any threat to the regime in the poster with the word "New Union - New Charnobyl." And it looked as if Fyodarev did not pay any attention to unsanctioned picketing. Obviously the judge was not going to punish Khamaida. There was the impression that someone at a high level was pressuring the judge.

When Uladimir Pleschenka, Yuras Maroz, Barys Khamaida did not appear in court on subpoena, judge Fyodarev sentenced them in their absence (Yu. Maroz and Uladimir Pleschanka received 22.5 million Belarusian rubble fine for taking part in picketing on 26th April, Pleschanka also received a 3 million Belarusian rubble fine for his actions on 17th April, Khamaida got 22.5 million Belarusian rubble fine for his poster "Belarus, independence, spring.")

While Yuras Maroz was in hospital on 26th June he was sentenced in his

absence to ten days administrative arrest for taking part in picketing on 26th April.

On 12th July during the opening ceremony of the Slavyansky Bazar festival, members of "Vybar" started singing Belarusian chastooska (two or four line folk verse, usually humorous and topical) from a poem "Luka Mudichev - president" written by Vedmak Lysagorsky while the president was making a speech nearby on the stage. One group of people was listing to the president while the other was listening to chastooska about him. Militiamen were so excited by the president's speech that they did not pay any attention to those singing chastooskas until a huge crowd had gathered around them. Then militiamen started to disperse the "listeners" and pushed he singers into the militia vehicle. It grew very noisy and people were shouting. There was not enough space in one car for all of the singers (Yuras Maroz, Yuras Karpov, Barys Khamaida, Uladimir Pleschanka) so another car was called for. Then they started beating Yu. Karpov and Yu. Maroz and transported them to the Chygunachny militia station. They stayed there until night when the president had gone to the town Ruba to spend the night.

On July 27, at six o'clock in the morning, Syarzhuk Serabro and Yuras Karpov were detained by a militia unit while fixing the white-red-white flag to trolleybus cables. The militia unit took them to the station and drew up a report and then took them to preliminary ward for temporary holding cell. On July 28, Yuras was taken to court of Kastrychinsky District of Vitebsk and was sentenced to pay a 9 million Belarusian rubble fine.

The flag was taken from the cables by the repair crew.

On July 27, during the closing ceremony of Slavyansky Bazar festival, Zmitser Pimenov was severely beaten near the Square of Will. He was speaking with his friends in Belarusian. He said to the militiaman "Pan policeman" and the militiaman reacted immediately: "I am so sick of you disgusting BPF members, seeing you in Minsk and here in Vitebsk," and attacked Pimenov. A few more militiamen rushed to them and helped to push Pimenov into the militia vehicle and there continued to beat him. He was unconscious when he was taken to detoxification where the authority did not want to accept him but a few minutes later deputy to the head of the Kastrychinsky District militia station Colonel Zablodsky arrived and persuaded them to leave him there. Pimenov was ordered to lay down on the bad in a face down position. When he refused they attacked him, fastened him to the bed and started beating him again. He was kicked out of the detoxification centre in the morning wearing torn clothes. He took a taxi and went to Oblast prosecutors office in that condition. The court medical commission made an examination of Pimenov and called the ambulance. Pimenov was sent to the Oblast hospital where he stayed in the area 17 days. The prosecutors office of Kastryhinsky District opened a criminal case investigating the beating of Zmitser Pimenov but till now the guilty party(ies), as in the case with Yu. Maroz, has not been found.

(to be continued in the next issue)

ECHO

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Spring '96"

5 THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM

POLITICS FACTS COMMENTS

(continued from page 1)

17 April - the newspaper "Naviny" discussed the regulation of the decree number 33 of the Committee of State Security of RB on giving a warning for "unallowable illegal actions". One of the leaders of BPF Vintsuk Vyachorka has no doubt that this order would become a "psychological club" against people who have their own opinions. He sees this order as an attempt by the government to use legitimise means to make it difficult for Belarusian citizens to be pro-active politically or even use peaceful protest.

20 April, the district attorney's office of Savetsky District, Minsk, violated the rights of journalists to receive information, threatened (on no grounds) to call the militia, prohibited them to even shoot the facade of their building. The district attorney Sirash nearly arrested the camera crew of ORT.

21 April, the Supreme Court reviewed the appeal of political prisoners A. Shydousky and V. Labkovitch. The sentence was not overruled.

21 April Grodno newspaper "Pagonya" published an open letter from leaders of the several public organisations to city and Oblast leaders with a proposal to stop persecuting for political reasons member of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet 13th session of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet Syamen Domash. S. Domash "for the second year already cannot find work because at one time he voted in parliament in favour of the president's retirement." And now they want to leave his family without housing.

22 April, Vadzim Kanapatsky was sentenced to ten days arrest for participation in a demonstration which took place 22 March in Minsk. The sentence was passed by A. Barysyonok, judge of Central District Court.

22 April, at an exhibition of U. Miranenko's work in Gomel, censors removed one of the posters showing the Belarusian president drawn in a Napoleon hat.

22 April, newspaper "Nasha Slova" (Our Word) pub-



lished a copy of a document from the Derzhinsky experimental-mechanical factory of city Derzhinsk, Minsk Oblast. In the document, the director of the factory, Bykovsky, prohibits the use of Belarusian language in business correspondence, allowing only the use of Russian.

23 April, after the Congress of the Union of Belarusian Writers at which criticism was raised of the anti-Belarusian policies of the country's leadership, the destruction of Belarusian schools, artificial restriction of the Belarusian language that president Lukashenka leads, an attack on the editors of Belarusian journals "Polymyia" and "Belarus" as well as newspaper "Literatura i Mass-tatsiva" and pogroms of their locations.

24 April, In the city of Novopolatsk of Vitebsk Oblast a picket was held in defence of the arrested leader of "Youth Front" P. Sevaryanets. Three picketers were taken in by militia: Anatol' Kakhanchyk, Zmitser Salav'ev, Ales' Banderenka. The pictures of the picket taken by a photojournalist were exposed in the militia headquarters.

24 April, Belarusian and Russian organisations picketed the Belarusian Embassy in Moscow.

25 April, after the meeting and manifestation in honour of the anniversary of the accident at Charnobyl Atomic Energy Station, a large group (nearly 50) of Belarusian and Russian citizens were arrested. They were arrested by "people in civilian clothes" and were hit and kicked.

-Among those arrested:

Alena Aleinikova - born 1978 member of the Citizens' Forum.

Dzyanis Andruschanka - born 1983.

Dar'ya Bulychova - Russian citizen, 17 years old.

Syargei Byrda - resident of Grodno, born 1982.

Konstantin Gudkov - Russian citizen, born 1977.

Ruslan Guk - born 1978.

Alyaksei Dailido - born 1982.

Alena Efimenka - resident of Grodno, born 1982.

Pyotr Koznacheyev - resident of Grodno, born 1982.

Oleg Kolyada - Russian citizen, born 1975.

Syargei Kamarovskii - resident of Grodno, born 1980.

Yavgen Kashpar - resident of Grodno, born 1982.

Ales' Kreshan - resident of Grodno, born 1983.

Alyaksei Litvinka - born 1983.

Loban - resident of Grodno.

Raman Mazurenka - born 1982.

Mikhailchik - deputy

chairman of the BPF organisation of Grodno, held in the isolation cell 3 days.

Zmitser Markushevsky - born 1978.

Nadzeya Nikolaeva - born 1980.

Mikhas' Rusetsky - member of the Citizens' Forum, held for more than five hours in the militia station, no protocol written, no explanations requested. Released at 2:40 am.

Alyaksandr Svinarenka - born 1983.

Suvorov - Russian citizen, co-ordinator of "Amnesty International".

Syargei Tomashevsky - resident of Grodno, born 1981.

Anton Taras - born 1983, while in custody a gas mask was placed on his face, the tube was closed and he was not allowed to breathe.

Georgy Telenyov - Russian citizen, born 1977.

Yavgen Chyrenyov - born 1978.

30 April, newspaper "Navini" reported agitation among prisoners in the high security colony in Gor'ky, Mogilev Oblast - nearly 600 prisoners participated. They demanded that conditions be improved, protested the poor quality of food for prisoners who are, by the way, overpopulated to almost twice the limit.

The materials of this page are prepared by the Press Service of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"

CENSORS BY THEIR OWN WILL

ADMINISTRATION OF MINSK SCHOOL NUMBER 37 ACCUSED A TEACHER OF BELARUSIAN SPEAKING CLASSES OF "POLITICAL ACTIVITIES" DURING THIRD GRADE LESSONS.

The case has been recently reviewed in the court of the Central District of Minsk. It could be called both typical and atypical. From one point of view it reflected exactly the morals and manners of modern Belarusian society as well as conditions in which the Belarusian school system has found itself. At the same time not every person can take a risky step and defend his/her honour and dignity in court from the injustice of a boss or administrative bureaucrats... But Lëanarada Muhina, a teacher from Minsk school number 37 did just that...

In March of this year, during one of the breaks between lessons, a meeting of teachers was held, initiated by the administration of school number 37. V. Galikina, school principal, explained the purpose of the meeting: the school received a letter from parents complaining that third grade teacher "G" was taking lesson time to "push BPF policies, prepare more resources for opposition..." And in general that she was only pushing her political views. Here is how young teacher of Belarusian language and literature Tatiana Zhuravel recalls the incident: "At first there were a few minutes of silence. I asked the first question: I asked how many parents signed that letter. The answer was: "Does that make a difference at this moment?" Later they told us that about half of the class had signed."

I tell you frankly that the

letter that became the grounds for accusing the teacher was never seen by anyone. Only one teacher witnessed in court that she had "passed it on to the director at the request of parents" and then read it on 10 April. Journalists were not shown the letter (21 April, the press was not allowed into the court hearings and before that the head of the Central District RONO (Regional Association of Science and Education) Yu. Kansas was physically beating away the questions of Radio Svoboda correspondents). Further inquiries of that historical document cause too much suspicion that the document is a fake. Judge for yourselves. One of the witnesses says that the parents wrote the complaint themselves - but the head of RONO claims that the parents simply signed the letter. So who thought up and wrote the letter? No answer... As far as the signatures are concerned, I take courage to say that the number of them was determined by high-level authorities. The director of school number 37, having bent the corners of the letter that was full of mistakes, showed it to me. (As Ms. Galikina pointed out to me, the mistakes were a sign that the letter was written by parents, not by the "showers of kindness, reason and the eternal"). Here is a sentence that was in the copy which was shown to me "18 people do not agree with Mukhina's activities, connected with involving their children into

politics..." Not too persuasive. It sounds more like an order or report.

After the court process was over one math teacher made a slip of the tongue and mentioned that: "You have to understand why the letter was anonymous... Parents wanted to come to court but we did not want to involve them..." There we are. That means that the teachers arranged an obstruction, based on the anonymous letter, for a young teacher of Belarusian language? That is why colleagues of Lëanarada Stanislavovna started to demand later for an investigation into whether there was any letter, and remembered the methods of 1937 in school number 37.

Well, investigations can be held in different ways. The school administration strictly forbade Mukhina to hold a meeting of parents to learn of the circumstances and reasons for the letter of complaint. In order "not to involve..." "not to divide..." And if, according to the administration, the whole school is talking about the event why would the keep the story from "the school". It turns out that it is more convenient to take the conflict and, to put it simply, hide it away far from curious eyes...

The defence in court of directors of the school and its regional management looked like a series of attacks on the teacher of Belarusian language. They made it seem that her pupils weren't learning as well, that some political leaflets were found in their things, that the

teacher would not clean the blackboard, and (how terrible) somebody saw her reading an opposition newspaper!... The more I listened to the teacher, the more clear it became to me how humble she was, how afraid and even sometimes to such extremes she was brought to in such a life. If a fairy tale written in according to Taraschkevich grammar or a subscription to "Nasha Slova" (Our Word - the newspaper of the Society of Belarusian Language) is awful, then I feel sorry for them!

The board of judges with T. Zlobich declared a non suit for L. Mukhina. By this they justified the administration. It is clean, fair, unmarred... But when their children will ask them in a few years what they were doing during the dark days for Belarus they will have to answer and they will have to say that they were afraid of losing their working hours, that they lied by saying that Belarusian schools were closed by the parents' will (according to Yuri Kansas) and how those who loved Belarus suffered. Not a single parent said openly that they were disappointed by the teacher's "political activities". In all discussions directed not to the fake letter, but rather to the people attitude towards opposition forces the hand and mind of Kansas was felt. As it is known, it is exactly Kansas who administrated the school in which Labkovitch studied (he is in prison at present). And after the notorious referendum Kansas was first in his district of Minsk who stopped teaching children in Belarusian.

That is why Mukhina's intention to defend her honour and dignity again - it is aspiration for defending Belarus and its honour.

Tatsjana SNITKO

LABOUR DAY FOR THE KEEPERS OF THE REGIME

(continued from page 3)

At the same time in another court of the Moscow District, the cases of other detainees were under consideration. This was not the case for Andrei Zavatsky since he was freed after being beaten severely. Three members of Young Gramada - Zmitsev Marchuk, Pavel Khavrotsin and Alyaksei Gerasimov were accused of breaching the same article 167 and sentenced to three days

imprisonment (they are already out of their cell). Mikola Kolas was given a warning. Some detainees asked for lawyers to represent them and the court hearings were postponed by the judge Zana Lyavitskaya till the 8th of May. The court ruled that Gleb Kukharonok from Young Gramada was not guilty. The case was still being heard when Statkevich's lawyer Vera Stremkovskaya announced the postponement of the leader of

People's Front case. This was a strange situation: at one end of the city judge V. Elsmann was determining whether the march was sanctioned or unsanctioned and on the other end of Minsk judge Z. Lyavitskaya was punishing people for taking part in a march which, possibly, was not "illegal"... By the way, her judgements on the same offence vary quite drastically: one receives a three day sentence, another receives a

warning and the third is justified (then why did he spend three nights in jail?)

The cases of Kiril Egidzin, Ales' Novikav, Syargei Martashev (they, by the way helps a three day fast behind bars), member of People's Gramada Ales' Stankevich and member of BPF Lyavon Achlovsky were postponed until 13 May. Of course, results of their consideration are directly related to the decision in the case of M. Statkevich in the Central District Court. The leader of the PG may be found not guilty. But then the question arises - what about his "accomplices", why did they spend three days in preliminary wards?

J. Z.

Accents

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Spring '96"

7 THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM

FROM THE INSIDE OF THE "VALADARKA"

Colony-3

"Kitcha" was situated on the basement under the administration room, composed of several cells reminding me of "otstoinik" (special ward) inside Valadarka with grey rough walls and barred window. In the first cell were inmates who usually never got out and in the remainder of the cells were those who breached internal discipline. The cells have never been empty, at least during my stay there. It is considered that refusal to work or escape from there is the most severely punished breach of discipline. In winter when prisoners of the colony lack food they start to attempt escape on purpose in order to be put firstly to "kitcha" and then prison.

Those who are returned to the colony after an escape are put into the "kitcha" immediately. There have already been three men in a little cell 3 by 4 where I was brought to. They all were taken from work because a supervisor sensed alcohol on their breath. In contrast to a prison where in "kitcha" where administration gives food every other day, here you can only hope for a stroke of luck. Probably acquaintance will notice and then give you some food. In the evening before militiaman permits you to take warm clothes (they take them in the morning) and go to bed you have to feed a big rat (old prison tradition) so that it would not eat the clothes or the inmate himself at night.

Next morning I thought I got a stroke of luck when one of the militiamen on duty brought food. But he threw it away into the trash purposely. When doing this he took a plastic bag filled with matches and cigarettes from a jar. I did not know who had handed food over to me but it was obvious that somebody squealed on me because the militiamen did not check the rest of the jars. Squealing is widespread practice in prison. Everyone who wants to get out of here on pre-term release has to cooperate with militiamen. The more people he will "sell" (that will mean he is changing for the better) the quicker he will leave prison.

On the third night authorities realised that I did not refuse to work and did not breach the discipline but had got into the prison's "kitcha" under the initiative of warrant officer Alyaksandrovich.

In prison all people live in "families" consisting of four men and it is much easier to survive in this way - and they share money, food, cigarettes.

In spring 1997, the last people who were granted amnesty were freed and

there was no problem to get a good "schkanar" (place). I became fourth in a "family". I was invited by former worker of a drama theatre with whom we had common friends "outside" and whom I gave food while I stayed in a barrack. I had three months and three days to stay in the colony so I was not eager to work there and I knew that I would never see money for that work. For three months working for the state farm "sovkhoz" Koptevsky I unloaded three hundred tons of nitrates of different sorts and I got for that job two bags of tea and a pack of cigarettes.

In the middle of May a new group of prisoners came from Gomel and one more man joined "our family" a former director of Pinsk trade centre. He looked very ill and was so skinny. He spent eleven months in preliminary ward, had eight court hearings but did not prove his innocence. The reason for bringing a case against the director was relations with the local prosecutor to whom the former refused to do a favour by employing the prosecutor's nephew. The director was accused of abusing his influence and of using his own equipment at work. During eleven months of prosecution procedures authorities had not found additional evidence and the verdict was: "to consider a year spent in a preliminary ward as a punishment" and also to send him to a colony settlement for eighteen days.

As the day of release from the colony drew near, the days grew longer and the hours passed more slowly even though the colony administration does not allow you to be idle. Three times per day they count heads, twice every night the militiaman ("ment") bursts into the cell, switches on the light and stomps around the cell.

We did not have free time in the colony even if one is not at work. The whole day you are under the eyes of the authorities and officials of all ranks from sergeant to warrant officer try to find any possible work for you to do. Sometimes it is just absurd. In winter they force you to clean barracks all day long or shovel snow back and forth. In spring and summer you work the whole day in the greenhouse of the colony, built especially for the administration. The worst procedure can be "gathering wild flowers" by crawling on you knees alongside the walls of the barracks until you get a bouquet and there is not a single flower on the grass plot. The first of "wild flower gathering" nearly ended in a tragedy for the newest member of our "family". He was able to stand in a bent over position for only one hour, then he fell down. Warrant officer who was supervising the flower gathering nudged him with his foot and ordered him to get up. But the man could not. Then the warrant officer noticed that the man's eyes had rolled back and he called for an ambulance. After several injections the "director" recovered.

That event made authorities of the colony a little bit less reckless and they did not touch him for the next few days. Thought they knew that no one can be healthy after having spent eleven months in the Belarussian preliminary ward.

Mikola KACHAN

(continuation to follow)

"PODOGREV" (SUPPLEMENT) FROM OUTSIDE

WHAT AND IN WHICH QUANTITIES CAN BE HANDED OVER TO YOUR RELATIVE, ACQUAINTANCE, FRIEND, WHO GOT INTO A PRELIMINARY WARD OR PRISON...

In one parcel ("podogrev") from outside to a prisoner or to those who are under prosecution can be up to eight kilograms of food (material things are not counted). It is not a lot taking into consideration conditions of prisons nowadays and the fact that prisoners survive there only by the hope for a parcel "podogrev" from outside. What products should you send?

Products

1. Salo (bacon) - 1.75 kg
2. Sausage (with a long shelf life) - 1 kg
3. tea (in plastic bags) - 0.5 kg (coffee is possible - 250 g.
4. onions - 0.5 kg, garlic - 1kg., lemon - 1 kg.
5. candies (caramel) 1 kg.
6. margarine (Rama) 0.5 kg
7. bullion (soup) - 250 g

Things:

- personal hygiene products (tooth-brush etc. - must be new) linens, socks as well.
- Cigarettes (must be taken from the pack, twisted together with thread and put into a plastic bag)
- Disposable razors are allowed.
- Bandages, iodine, antiseptic, Band-Aids
- Napkins
- Paper and pen or pencil

(continuation from volumes 2-3 and 5-7)